

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 22, 2022

The Honorable Richard W. Spinrad, Ph.D.
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad,

NOAA has received nearly \$6 billion in the 117th Congress – \$3 billion through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and \$2.8 billion through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) – to implement solutions and conduct research that will aid in efforts to protect our nation’s coasts. As the Senate and House sponsors of the *Living Shorelines Act*, we are proud of this immense investment to build community and ecosystem resilience to climate change while bolstering our economy. We urge you to dedicate the necessary resources that will ensure the swift implementation of these critical investments in our coastal communities.

Our bill sought to provide funding for communities to construct specific types of nature-based resilience projects, known as living shorelines, and fund continued research of these projects’ ability to reduce risks from flooding disasters and shoreline erosion. We urge you to make use of existing authorities and resources – notably the funding provided in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) and the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-69 Sections 40001, 40003, and 40004) – to enable these important efforts.

According to your own agency, living shoreline projects deliver environmental benefits that can “improve water quality, provide fisheries habitat, increase biodiversity, and promote recreation”.¹ Additionally, some kinds of living shorelines projects can deliver incredible blue carbon benefits. For instance, just one square mile of salt marsh stores 76,000 gallons of carbon each year, aiding in our urgent fight to mitigate greenhouse gas pollution. Living shorelines are also adaptive in the face of environmental change like sea level rise and can regenerate. They are also affordable, their construction creates direct and indirect jobs, and they help avoid expensive damage and recovery costs after flooding.

We are encouraged that NOAA has quickly worked to implement the IIJA and continue to urge the agency to support living shoreline projects through programs funded in that bill like the National Oceans and Coastal Security Fund and the Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resiliency grants. However, there continues to be an immense need in our states to secure funding for living shoreline projects. To fill this need, Congress included a provision in the IRA clearly supporting living shorelines by providing project funding for “conservation, restoration, and protection of coastal and marine habitats” and preparing “for extreme storms and

¹ “What is a Living Shoreline?” U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Retrieved from <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/living-shoreline.html>.

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other changing climate conditions.”² NOAA should use this funding to directly support these projects.

In addition, our legislative efforts have also centered on funding monitoring, data collection, and evaluation of specific nature-based infrastructure projects and the overall effectiveness of different nature-based resilience tools. We request that NOAA use the \$200 million in the IRA that funds research on the topics of weather, coasts, oceans and climate, or other funding, to study nature-based resilience projects. This work is vital to establishing a set of best practices to help increase the use of nature-based projects and ensure that federal dollars are funding the best climate adaption strategies to mitigate disasters and reduce recovery costs.

For years, coastal resilience projects focused on hardening coastlines with concrete and metal structures. There remains a clear benefit and need for projects like this, but state coastal zone managers and municipal leaders are also eager to employ a diverse array of nature-based tools to mitigate flooding, erosion, and sea level rise risks. Many of these potential recipients of NOAA project funding are encountering challenges in planning and permitting for nature-based solutions over more traditional coastal solutions, such as concrete sea walls. We encourage you to use the \$20 million in IRA funding intended to support efficient and effective reviews, and other agency funding, to assist potential recipients of IJA and IRA coastal resilience project funding in removing roadblocks. Planning and permitting that favors traditional solutions must not be a challenge to communities seeking to benefit from innovative living shorelines solutions.

Coordinating these efforts with Congress, federal partners, state agencies, and other stakeholders will be vital for the successful implementation of living shorelines projects. We ask that you utilize the nearly \$6 billion at your disposal to build up the resilience of our nation’s coastal environment by closely working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has received \$125 million in IRA funding to protect habitats from weather events, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. We also ask that you provide annual reports to Congress on the use of these funds for project implementation, research, and reviews. Additionally, we urge you to provide regular briefings to Congress on the activities of the Coastal Resilience Interagency Working Group, which you co-lead. As the bicameral leaders on the issue of nature-based resilience solutions and the originators of the legislative language from which NOAA has been afforded this great opportunity, we are eager to provide your agency with any support it may need to carry out the legal mandates of the IJA and IRA.

Through dedicated investments in the IJA and IRA, Congress has provided NOAA with a historic opportunity to protect American coastal communities and our precious ecosystems from climate change threats. We urge you to prioritize nature-based coastal resilience efforts, like living shoreline infrastructure and research, as you create plans for this significant funding.

² Public Law 117-169

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We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you to advance our shared goals of protecting coastal communities and habitats.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
U.S. SENATOR



Frank Pallone, Jr.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS